DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 402 311 SP 037 081

AUTHOR Williams, Marium T.
TITLE Long Term Impact on Reforming Classroom Practice.
PUB DATE 96
NOTE 38p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141) -- Tests/Evaluation Instruments (160)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Action Research; Classroom Techniques; *College School Cooperation; Educational Change; Elementary Education; Elementary School Teachers; Higher Education; Parent Teacher Cooperation; Partnerships in Education; School Districts; Schools of Education; *Teacher Collaboration; *Team Teaching
IDENTIFIERS *Kentucky Education Reform Act 1990; *Morehead State University KY

ABSTRACT

This paper describes Morehead State University's support of the Kentucky Education Reform Act through mini-grants to public school teachers to help them implement state reform mandates and guidelines in the classroom through in-school action research projects. Morehead State University funded 18 mini-grants to 14 different schools in 11 different districts. The projects integrated action research with motivation theory and adult learning that emphasized job-embedded study and practice. Teachers involved in the projects studied their practice in a rational and methodical fashion, contributed to the profession's knowledge base, wrote and reflected on their work, and collaborated with other professionals in pairs or teams. Five themes emerged in participants view of the projects: (1) validation of self-efficacy; (2) enhanced communication; (3) opportunities to visit teachers in other schools; (4) parent involvement; and (5) acquiring materials. Some conclusions drawn from the Morehead State University project were: the mini-grant action research format encouraged instructional dialogue and teacher collaboration; university faculty were encouragers rather than experts on design; and statistics seemed to foster teachers commitment to their own projects. A Teacher Survey of Mini-grant Project is included in the report. (Contains 13 references.) (MAH)

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ED 402 311

Long Term Impact on Reforming Classroom Practice

Marium T. Williams

Morehead State University

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Long Term Impact on Reforming Classroom Practice

The Kentucky Education Reform Act (KERA) was supported by Morehead State University. (MSU) through mini grants that focused on in-school action research projects. In the spring and summer of 1994 Morehead State University funded mini-grants to public school teachers. The purpose of this project was to help Kentucky public school teachers implement state reform mandates and guidelines into the classroom. The purposes of the mini grants themselves seem diverse. (Please note their listing in tables within this document.) Yet each one reflected an articulation of practioners desiring to get started or extend an implementation of the comprehensive reform plan that KERA had laid out for them. The projects were carefully screened by a committee of KERA Alliance participants from the university, public schools and state department personnel. The screeners looked for project proponents that were seeking to change practices within their own schools. MSU funded 18 mini grants to 14 different schools in 11 different districts. These grants ranged from $250 to $1000. The teacher teams were 2 to 5 in number.

The theoretical frame guiding these supportive educators integrated action research with adult learning (Knowles, 1978) and motivation theory. (de Charms, 1968). The action research portion focused on adult learning that emphasized job-embedded study and practice. The underpinning motivation theory was that the "locus of control" was within each practitioner.

The linking of mini grants and the action research format as professional development tools was a natural one. The mini grants gave teachers incentives to use their own designs and initiative to change their classroom. This sort of freedom of choice promotes the

autonomy and creativity that motivates individuals in the school and or workplace (Deci, 1985; Deming, 1986; de Charm, 1968; Ryan, 1985; Lepper, 1988; Kohn, 1993; Ouchi, 1982.) The use of Action Research asked teachers to use simple data gathering tools to evaluate their own project's efficacy. As one action research proponent described it "Teachers do what they normally do: they just do it more formally." (Calhoun, 1994 p.4.).

The grant recipients were pairs or groups of teachers interested in studying or beginning to try out some components of the mandated reform in Kentucky. There were some teams which were interested in integrated curriculum concerns such as the Foxfire, Shared Thematics, Integrating Literature and Whole Language. Three projects were concerned with the management aspects of reform. These three teams were in the same school in Pike County. They wanted to visit exemplary sites to see how others were implementing change. Two projects focused on math curriculum. One explored cooperative learning, and the other implemented the manipulative math games of Box It and Bag It.

Two projects focused on involving parents in the literacy development of their children. All of these aforementioned projects were in primary and middle grades. Only three projects were granted to high school teachers and only one is reported here. The other two project members had transferred to other schools and districts. This project, the Sunshine School, was the investigation of alternative education for students who were at high risk for dropping out of school.

The selection committee eventually granted money to all those who sent in their request. This committee asked for the university to increase their grant money and the university agreed to do so. The participants were from a variety of counties within the

service area of KEDC, MSU and Regions Seven and Eight Service Centers. The projects were the result of the wide range of reform concerns of these teachers. The positive results seen below are heartening. These teachers and these small grants made an important impact in moving their schools forward in implementing change. Tom Guskey's (1994) research on how teachers implement change seems to be validated here. Teachers need to see the change within their own schools and classrooms for them to embrace change as a viable option.

The eleven university faculty that supported these teachers were encouragers rather than leaders in this implementation. University faculty by visiting no more than two times tried to provide constructive feedback to help these classroom teachers implement their own design. Then the university and the university participants hosted a showcase evening to provide the teachers with an opportunity to share their projects with others at an on-campus event. The reports and reflections on each project were sent to the university prior to the dinner so that complete packets of projects were available to all participants. These report were written from a teacher's perspective. The university faculty did not try to impose scholarly tests of significance into these reports, but encouraged clarity and focus on improved practice. Reports of university faculty imposing formal statistical structures on public schools indicate such structures slow linkages between research and its implementation into classrooms. (De Sanctis & Blumberg, 1979).

Teachers were encouraged to gather test scores either teacher-made, state made or standardized as indicators of progress. Other more affective kinds of feedback were gathered from students, parents, and other teachers. These kinds of surveys and interviews linked to their usual grades and scores enriched the teachers assessment of their projects. The

opportunity to share their findings helped the teachers feel they were contributing to the knowledge base of their profession.

These four components of this teacher development activity were significant: Teachers were-

1. Studying their practice in a rational and methodical fashion.
2. Contributing to the profession's knowledge base.
3. Writing and reflecting on their work.
4. Collaborating with other professionals in pairs or teams of teachers.

Sprinthall &Thies-Sprinthall (1982) point out that teachers who interact with other teachers about teaching improve cognitive complexity and thus raise their own competency as teachers. Research by Showers and Little (1982) on developing teachers tells us that teachers' growth occurs when they are given an opportunity to tie new learnings directly into their workplace, observe and reflect with colleagues and share with others about their work. Carl Glickman (1995) states that in developing teachers those who have nondirective supervisors improve to a higher concept level than those with more directive supervisors.

To check again the success reported by each project at the end of the 1993-94 grant year, a survey was taken two years later. The writer contacted, by phone, a reporter from each of these projects. The winter storms of '96 had snow bound most of eastern Kentucky. Therefore, everyone was contacted within several days. There were no school or personal schedules to work around so most reporters were willing to spend a half hour to an hour on the phone. They had no prior warning of such an interview so their memories of their project were spontaneous and uncoached.

The observation and reflections of the mini-grant participants seemed to validate that this research does fit the experience and impact make by these teachers in their change efforts over the past two years. A question that was asked early in the interview was, "What was the best result of your grant project?" The teachers assessment of the effectiveness of their projects were upbeat and positive. However, five themes have emerged as to how these participants viewed their projects. The first one was feelings of validation of self-efficacy. The second was enhanced communication within one's school. The third was opportunities to visit, to see other classrooms in other schools and communicate with those teachers. The fourth theme was of parent involvement, and the fifth was acquiring materials.

Validation of Self Efficacy

One of the themes voiced by 30% of the participants had to do with the personal validation they experienced during the project. One reported, "I was able to let others know I was not in left-field when I used Foxfire as a reform project." Another spoke for her group when she said "we wanted to see if our writing process, regional literature and Kentucky reform were a fit. We did see this fit well with Kentucky reform expectations, these teachers' strategies worked." This same response was given by another teacher concerned about her reform efforts with fourth graders.

Enhanced Communications

The second theme that emerged was how this project enhanced communication within the schools in which these teachers worked. One respondent was now working as an administrator but said that her understanding of the value of collaboration and communication had carried over into her role as an administrator. A teacher group who communicated

together before answering these questions (How very appropriate) responded, "We increased the use of thematic teaching and learning centers in all of our classrooms." One teacher reported "Communication was stimulated between the grades, both teachers and students. Sixth graders were writing to younger students and visa versa."

Opportunities to Visit

A third theme emerged centered on the opportunities they enjoyed by going out and seeing other teachers and other schools and looking at other programs and strategies. One teacher mentioned, "We visited districts with alternative schools and then felt we were better able to establish our own independent school." One reporter enjoyed visiting schools recommended by KDE: Another felt pressured to change from traditional teaching methods, and she said "I was able to actually see a whole language classroom." One teacher was glad that she was able to take her children to see the university. "We came to Morehead State University to the Folk Art Museum. Our kids had never been to the university. They saw that life and said they wanted to go there."

Parent Involvement

A fourth theme that is readily noted is that of parental involvement in their children's schooling through this project. A teacher who was trying to establish a manipulative math program " Box It and Bag It" in her primary class mentioned that by getting parents involved making math materials they were able to get started on a program that is now the core of their math in the primary. At the same time these parents learned about the value of "Box It and Bag It". Another teacher was pleased that her primary children, because of this project, were able to take their story books home to share with their parents. "Parents were very

receptive to sharing books with their children and would write favorable comments." Another teacher mentioned "I used journal writing as a daily activity. I used this journal as an assessment indicator of a child's growth. Parents are pleased to see these journals." This same teacher emphasized that one of the grant's goals was to inform parents of appropriate literacy practices for young children.

Acquiring Materials

A fifth outcome noted was the acquiring of more resources for their instruction-information, equipment, tradebooks, professional materials and even money for workshops, banquets and transportation. The Star I & II school bought a camcorder for recording students work and enriching student portfolios with these recordings. They also recorded schoolwide events. That same school had purchased books and book bags to facilitate young children taking books home. The Boyd County Project valued the opportunity to read and study the research on collaboration. The Oil Springs Project pointed out that being able to take students out to dinner at a local restaurant was a growth experience for some of those children who had not had that opportunity before. The Betsy Layne school report highlighted buying training film to share with other teachers interested in "Box It and Bag It". The Literacy Project teachers at Nicholas County highlighted professional materials that were shared with their colleagues. Resources were used to benefit schools and their stakeholders in various ways, but most of these expenditures seemed to be perceived as money well spent.

In evaluative statements of those reporting there was more than adequate evidence of the success of this project. Some of the strongest indications that these participants felt their projects were worthwhile was the question which asked, "What would you do differently if

given this opportunity again?" All of their responses were indicators of their perception that the projects were worthy. Four stated a genuine "liking" of the project. Four other respondents wanted to visit or study more schools and their implementation of reform. Four other reporters mentioned sharing their projects with more teachers both within the school and with others outside their school.

Three mentioned "do more" kinds of activities like spend more time, do more dramas, buy a better camera or two cameras." There was even a "wistful" response from a new administrator and her collaborating colleague that they missed the classroom. To reinforce this satisfaction with this project, all the representatives of these projects answered "yes" to the use of project components still existing in their work. Three of these reporters are now administrators, but report supporting teachers using these components in their schools or continuing the practice in their development as an administrator. The twelve reporters who still work as teachers could name specific ways these components were still being implemented into their classroom. (see items 5-6-7).

Another indicator of the long range positive effects of this project was the affirmative responses to question eight - Have the numbers of teachers in your building increased their use of these kinds of practices? Everyone said yes except the administrator who now is in the central office and does not visit her building enough to answer this question. She does mention a colleague who is soon returning to the classroom with a determination to continue the collaboration that was the focus of their project.

Question nine asked for a more quantitative answer about teachers using elements of the mini-grant project, "Approximately how many teachers presently use these or similar

practices?" Six reported all teachers using these or similar practices. Two more gave similar positive reports when they state "all have some of these practices" or "most everyone" uses these practices. One who is in a very small school of about six teachers said "there was one now there are four." Another reports a fivefold impact. She says "there were two of us and now there are ten." Two others were not sure and two projects reported a modest 25% gain. This seems to demonstrate that about 73% of these projects had a widespread lasting effect into the practices of the schools in which these teachers worked.

Question ten asked, "If you have ceased using this practice, describe your present practice and the reason for preferring the new strategy." Almost all saw this as not appropriate to them since they still used the practice. Administrators were still in support of the practices in their projects. Some changes were, a continued focus on "writing for a purpose but no inner school mail delivery." Another change was the varying of enrichment programs to meet developmental needs and to fit time constraints. Both of these "changes" however, reflect refinement of practices still in progress that can be traced to mini-grant projects.

This report on the project of Morehead State University seems to indicate that for universities seeking ways to support reform the mini grant action research format may have long term benefits for reform implementation.

This format encourages the instructional dialogue and teacher collaboration so often reported in effective schools research. The strategy of university faculty acting as encouragers rather than experts on design and statistics seemed to foster teachers commitment to their own project. At the same time university faculty witnessed in the school

the challenges of reform and the efforts teachers made to improve instruction. The university campus as a resource and center for professional collaboration was an appreciated component. The money, though small, encouraged study, collaboration, experimentation and assessment of practices. This brought inquiry into practice by linking the university to public schools. This was a fitting beginning for the "simultaneous renewal." John Goodlad is proposing for improvement of both higher education and public schools.

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Table 1.

Teacher Survey of Mini-grant Project					
Questions	Foxfire-Reporter Rhonda Bach. Botts Elementary. Dr. Phyllis Oakes MSU Collaborator.	Investigating Exemplary Models. Reporter-Nancy Jo Justice. Pikeville Elementary 4th grade. Dr. Tim Miller MSU Collaborator.	Investigating Exemplary Models. Reporter-Kim McPeek. Pikeville Elementary 5th grade. Dr. Tim Miller MSU Collaborator.	Investigating Exemplary Models. Reporter-Jane Pruitt. Pikeville Elementary 6th grade. Dr. Tim Miller MSU Collaborator.	Integrating Literature. Reporter-Bernard Ruif. Augusta Elementary. Dr. Phyllis Oakes MSU Collaborator.
What was the purpose of your grant?	To see if The Foxfire Projects aligned with KERA learning goals.	To see if their teaming design was being done in other schools.	To see how other schools were transitioning children from the primary.	To see how to change practices to fit KERA.	To spend time in the summer developing units that used literature books instead of basal text.
What was the best result(s)?	To let others know I was not out in left field by using Foxfire.	We were validated in our practice and enjoyed seeing others use of computers.	Getting to see what other schools were doing.	Teachers were able to visit schools recommended by KDE-saw schedules, assessments KELP like ones.	Increased interest in reading for a purpose. You can do more with a book, develop more, focus more.

Teacher Survey of Mini-grant Project					
What would you do differently?	I would give myself more time. I liked sharing ideas most grants don't give you that opportunity. MSU sharing event.	It would be nice to have visited more schools.	More on site visits.	I would call more schools and do a broader survey.	Now I am a principal, but still would support this kind of project.
What did you learn?	I learned to speak out for what I had done and to write grants. It built leadership skills.	I learned that other teachers also wanted to network and share ideas. Particularly portfolio ideas.	I looked at other schools science classes, time schedule. Science was sometimes being pushed back. My students were still getting science.	I learned no one had the answers. We were not out of it.	I learned I could tailor instruction. Not everyone had to read the same. Boys likes differ from girls, more flexibility, not depend on others.
Are there components in you class today similar to grant?	I am now a principal, but my teachers are doing much of it.	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

Teacher Survey of Mini-grant Project					
What are those components?	Teachers are allowing children to choose what they learn.	Probably in the areas of teaming technology and portfolio.	There is continuity, from one grade to another. This helps transition. We are teaming.	We added an enrichment program to our schedule.	I left those units and materials in my classroom and they are still being used.
Have you a specific project you can name that is like grant project?	Now a principal but I still attend the Foxfire events in the spring and fall. I still am in the Foxfire network and e-mail them.	Not a specific one like ones we saw but pressure is still there to improve in all areas.	Yes our whole teaming and planning approach.	Yes we are doing an enrichment program on the Mayans soon.	Teachers are reading with 4th graders. Jesse Stuart Readers and Old Yeller, etc. Last summer we had Book in the Bag Workshop.
Have the numbers of teachers in your building increased their use of these kinds of practices?	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

Teacher Survey of Mini-grant Project					
Approximately how many teachers presently use these or similar practices?	There was just one, now there are four.	Now all of us use cooperating to team and improve all of the 4th, 5th, and 6th grade teachers.	All of our teachers tried to go somewhere and learn about others.	Everyone is on board. We were intermediate and as we moved along everyone came.	Most everyone has something of this in their class.
If you have ceased using this practice, describe your present practice and the reason for preferring the new strategy.	Still support the practice as a principal.	NA	NA	The enrichment programs varies at different levels because of time constraints.	NA

Table 2.

Teacher Survey of Mini-Grant Project					
Questions	Power of Writing-Reporter Ann Lyon. Oil Springs Elementary-Johnson County. Dr. Marium Williams MSU Collaborator.	Shared Thematics Among Faculty and Friends (STAFF). Reporters-Brenda Lawrence, Dana Lane, and Elaine Brodrick. Nicholas County Elementary School. Dr. Marium Williams MSU Collaborator.	Climb Up to Literacy. Reporter Georgia Becker. Nicholas County Elementary School. Dr. Marium Williams MSU Collaborator.	Appalachia: Linking the Past to the Present. Reporter Karen Marsh. Verity Middle School-Ashland Ind. Dr. Marium Williams MSU Collaborator.	The Sunshine School-Reporter Bill Bueltermann. Rowan County High School. Dr. Marium Williams MSU Collaborator.
What was the purpose of your grant?	To see if our writing process, regional literature and KERA were a fit.	To encourage the use of thematic units and learning centers.	To inform faculty and parents of appropriate literacy practices for young children.	To prepare and implement area culture through Jesse Stuart Units.	To gain information about drop out prevention.

What was the result(s)?	Teachers did like this project and we did see that this fit well with KERA.	We did increase the use of thematic teaching and learning centers in our classrooms.	Professional resources were provided and available to all the faculty in the library.	We came to Morehead to the Folk Art Museum. Our kids had never been to the university. They saw that life and said they wanted to go there.	We visited districts with alternative schools and established our own independent school, it is now in its 3rd year. Forty kids have graduated about 50% may not have without this alternative.
What did you learn?	I felt validated, we kept records sent out questions to parents and students and they all indicated a successful project.	We learned the value of thematic teaching and how much easier it is when we share the units we prepare with others.	I learned strategies for applying for a grant and was encouraged to apply for more.	I learned more about Jesse Stuart.	There are other options. High Schools have gotten hard. A caring attitude makes a difference to these kids.

What would you do differently?	We held a contest and took kids to dinner and exposed them to good regional writers. I would do it again.	We would try to share our prepared thematic units with teachers from all schools.	I would involve more colleagues in the process.	I would do more dramas. We did a tree project. I would like to include more literature.	Now I would spend less time in Jefferson schools and look closer at the Ballard plan. Ours is too much into packet modules.
Are there components in your class today similar to grant?	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
What are those components?	Our lesson plans, hallways, and students writings.	We each teach through thematic units and centers.	Journal writing is a daily activity. I use the journal as a KELP appropriate indicator of a child's growth. Parents are pleased to see these journals.	I teach 8th grade history. We are involved in another grant project that includes literature, math, and science as well.	We use packets for units but we have two full-time teachers and one aide to implement the program.

Have you a specific project you can name that is like a grant project?	We have had Rebecca Caldwell and Cynthia Rylant as guest writers.	We use thematic units to integrate our subjects in our primary classrooms.	Yes. See journal writing above.	We are studying covered bridges.	Depending on funding we plan to continue this program.
Have the numbers of teachers in your building increased their use of these kinds of practice?	All were involved from the beginning.	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Approximately how many teachers presently use these practices?	All involved	About 25%	Of the primary teachers about 25%.	The 8th grade teachers went to Greenbow in the fall. All the 7th and 8th grade teachers are involved.	
If you have ceased using this practice, describe your present practice and the reason for preferring the new strategy.	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA

Table 3.

Teacher Survey of Mini-Grant Project					
Questions	Oakview Delivers Reporter- Cheryl Spears. Oakview Elementary Ashland Ind. Dr. Marium Williams MSU Collaborator.	Whole Language Instruction- Reporter-Angela Adkins. Mckell Elementary School Greenup	Star I and II Strategies Techniques, Activities for Reading- Reporter-June Hunt-Bethel Elementary School Bath County. Dr. Kathy Herzog MSU Collaborator.	Box It and Bag It- Reporter Shelia Hall-Betsy Layne Elementary School Floyd County. Dr. Marium Williams MSU Collaborator.	Developing Number Sense & Mathematical Understanding Cooperatively-Reporter Dawn Tackett- Boyd County Schools. Dr. Kent Freeland MSU Collaborator.
What was the purpose of the grant?	To get children to communicate and to understand the postal service.	To gain more background on whole language instruction.	To get more materials and equipment into the schools. Video camera and books, for kids to take home for parents to share.	To get training and materials for manipulative math.	To explore cooperative learning research and practice.

Teacher Survey of Mini-Grant Project					
What was the result(s)?	Communication between grades, 6th graders writing to yours and vice-versa developed camaraderie.	Gaining more knowledge base to make our decisions. We are bombarded by pressure to change from the traditional.	Using the camera to tape kids projects and sending books home with kids (librarian had not allowed us to do this before).	This is the core of our primary math program in K-1. We also got parents involved by making the materials for our math center.	To be able to look at the research.
What did you learn?	When children have tangible purpose the quantity and quality of their writing improves.	I was able to see a whole language classroom at Crabb Elementary in Boyd County.	Parents were very receptive to sharing books with their children and would write favorable comments. Also I learned to use a camera.	I had been frustrated before. I learned a different approach--I needed this organization.	Collaborative work with other works in all sorts of settings.
What would you do differently?	Involve more people, too many felt this was imposed on them rather than involving them.	I would visit more than one school more than once, maybe participate in teaching.	Buy a better camera or buy two. We have almost worn this one out.	We liked this project and we could not have it without this grant that was our first step.	I sometimes wish I had stayed in the classroom. Both Karen and I have taken on administrative roles since this grant.

Teacher Survey of Mini-Grant Project					
Are there components in your class today similar to grant?	Yes. The street names are still up like Little Dipper Drive but there is no regular mail.	Yes	Yes	Yes	I do not see this practice in the classroom that I left but I do use it in my work as an administrator.
What are those components?	Teachers do more friendly letters. They realize the best way to teach is to have pen pals some inside the school some between classes.	We are writing portfolios even in the primary. We are writing across the curriculum.	We still use camera. I want to get back to sending books in a bag but now the librarian lets kids take books home from the library.	We are adding things to it such as Magic Equations.	Karen Linville is returning to her classroom and will continue to use this sort of practice.
Have you a specific project you can name that is like grant project?	When we gave a play we got letters from our school audience. Students write thank-you notes more.	We are working on a weather unit and we are teaching across the curriculum P1 and P2 experiments with snow.	We taped our Christmas Program.	Yes. We have gotten a tape of this and the other teachers have seen it and made some of the games in a workshop. Time to make materials was the biggest drawback.	NA

Teacher Survey of Mini-Grant Project					
Have the numbers of teachers in your building increased their use of these kinds of practices?	We involved everyone, but the core who wrote the grant did most. Yes writing for a purpose has produced more writing and communication within the building.	Yes	Yes	Yes	NA
Approximately how many teachers recently use these practices?	I am not sure.	All have some of whole language in their classes.	The whole class uses camera and now even P 1 and P2's can take books home.	There were two of us in the grant but now about ten use the games.	NA
If you have ceased using this practice, describe your present practice and the reason for preferring new strategy.	More writing in classes with a purpose but no inner school mail delivery.	NA	NA	NA	As administrators use collaboration but not as a classroom teacher.